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Terrorist Organizations: Radicalization and Terrorism in South Punjab

Abstract:

Pakistan has been facing the challenges of extremism, Islamist militancy and terrorism since 1979 after the Soviet intervention into Afghanistan. The Muslim Mujahideen from all over the world fought against Soviet soldiers in Afghanistan as Holy Islamic Afghan Jihad. They were trained in Pakistan and were exported into Afghanistan to fight against Soviet army. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1988, many of the Mujahideens moved into Pakistan and married with Pakistani women and settled in Pakistan and joined different Militant Organizations and actively participated into terrorist attacks. The most militant organization Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Sectarian organization Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) belong to Deobandi sect are actively involved into terrorist activities in Pakistan particularly in South Punjab. The Southern Punjab that was formerly acknowledged for a humane and tolerant society, but from last few decades with the financial support from Saudi, Iran, Iraq and other Gulf countries has become a center for terrorist organizations. The general environment of impunity in South Punjab is increasing jihadist groups' recruitment potential. This paper examines the role of different terrorist organizations that are actively participating into terrorist attacks in South Punjab.

Key Words. *Terrorist organizations, Radicalization, Terrorism and South Punjab*

Introduction

The Punjab Province is larger in size and population than many South Asian countries. There are influential castes and clans having deep influence on socio-political lives of the people of Pakistan particularly the South Punjab¹. The Punjab Province has nine divisions and thirty-four districts including three division and fourteen districts of Southern region of Punjab. Pakistan Bureau of Statistics' Census 2017 estimated that total area of the South Punjab region of 03 civil divisions Multan division, Dera Ghazi Khan division and Bahawalpur division of eleven districts, Multan, Khanewal, Vehari, Dera Ghazi Khan, Layyah, Muzaffargarh, Rajanpur, Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Rahim Yar Khan and two districts Bhakkar and Mianwali of Sargodha division and one district Jhang of Faisalabad division is 122381 Sq. Km. with population of 30193618 persons. The Southern Punjab takes up 35.63 percent of Punjab's total population of 11,00,12442². The Southern Punjab region has 45 National Assembly and 95 Punjab Assembly seats in eleven districts of three civil division Multan, Dera Ghazi Khan and Bahawalpur divisions.

From 2001s, Pakistan has been challenging and facing the violence and terrorist attacks after the start of the global war against terrorism. The United State of America alleged that the leadership of Al-Qaeda, Osama-bin-Laden was masterminding of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which caused almost 3,000 casualties and prompted the United States to pledge the "War on Terror" against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan on the orders of the U.S. President George W. Bush, and the following War in Afghanistan. After the attacks of the United State of America and NATO forces into Afghanistan in October, 2001, "the militant of Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Lashkar-e-Tayyabe (LeT), Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Muhammadi(TNSM), Tehrik-e-Islami(TeJ), Al Qaeda (AQ), Millat-e-Islamia Pakistan(MIP), Khudam-ul-Islam(KUI), Islami Tehrik-e-Pakistan(ITP), Hizb-ul-Tahir(HUT), Jamat-ul-Ansar(JUA) and Jamat-ul-Furqan(JUF) escaped from Afghanistan and settled in the Federal Administrative Tribal Area(FATA) of Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, South Punjab and later on they organized themselves"³ and started to launch terrorist attacks in South Punjab. Pakistan has lost more than 36,495 lives and almost 27,985 people were injured during the violence and terrorist attacks. The 3,482 bomb blasts and 281 suicide attacks have been carried out⁴ and Pakistan has suffered more casualties than the collision forces⁵ of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization).

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¹ Surriya Shahab, "The Trends and Genesis of Radicalization in South Punjab: its Impacts on Governance" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, 2020).

² *Pakistan census report 2017.*

³ Surriya Shahab, Muhammad Idrees, Shida Rasool and Samana, "Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan(TTP) and Militancy in Pakistan", *Journal of Business and Social Review in Emerging Economies* 7, no. 3(2021):513-525

⁴ K.P.S. Gill, *Terrorists Incidents in Pakistan*, n.d., <http://www.satp.org> (accessed February 8, 2020).

The United States of America and Saudi Arabia poured billions in aid, all of which was controlled by the ISI, which ensured that the moderate, more nationalist's parties were left out and foreign militant were trained and deployed in Afghanistan⁶. When Soviet Union had gone from Afghanistan in 1988, many of the Mujahideens filtered back into Pakistan, and while some had joined the political religious parties in Pakistan and had become the active members of the religious political parties, which had supported them earlier on, many others entered Kashmir and started taking part in the insurgency in Indian-held Kashmir.

A careful investigation into profiles of 66 terrorists involved in suicide bombing and violent religious wars reveals that South Punjab tops in the recruitment of suicide bombers compared to Central Punjab and Khyber Pakhtun Khwa (KPK) districts.⁷ Out of the 66 alleged terrorists, 21 were wanted for suicide attacks and ten were recruited from the region of the South Punjab; and the remaining came from Central Punjab and KPK provinces as many as 45 Deobandi Madrassahs were found promoting religious extremism and out of them 25 were from South Punjab while 20 belonged to Punjab and KPK provinces⁸. The Bahawalpur district of South Punjab remained at the top with regard to recruitment of suicide bombers and master planners of suicide attacks. The Dera Ghazi Khan and Lodhran districts stood third and fourth in this regard⁹. No recruitment of suicide bombers has been reported from Multan, Khanewal, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalnagar, Rajanpur, Muzaffargarh and Layyah during year 2016-17¹⁰. The district with presence of hardliners, involved in the violent religious extremism, are Multan, Lodhran, Khanewal, Layyah Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur, Rajanpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and Muzaffargarh¹¹. The Sunni Deobandi extremists involved in terrorism incidents and declared offenders by courts belong to four South Punjab districts that are Khanewal, Layyah, Bahawalnagar, and Muzaffargarh¹². The districts of Multan, Bahawalnagar, Jhang, Toba Tek Singh and Muzaffargarh are found to be engaged in promoting Shia violent extremism¹³. A research conducted by Mapping Militant Organizations of Stanford University, USA has established that Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) of Maulana Masood Azhar in collaboration with other active organization of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has an active presence in South Punjab region. Bahawalpur is the home city of Maulana Masood Azhar. The South Punjab is providing a conducive environment for the promotion of extremism and recruitment of militants¹⁴. The South Punjab region is the birth place of militant and terrorist's organizations included in global terrorist list like Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), and Punjabi Taliban. The role and activism of the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) has earned it the title of mother of all sectarian outfits and Jihadi groups. The Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) can be appropriately called the Haqqani Network of South Punjab. The Reuters News Agency has published a story in 2009 regarding the roots of radicalization in South Punjab and close liaison and affiliation of the terrorist's organization of the South Punjab with countrywide Taliban terrorism network, Al-Qaeda and Daish¹⁵. The Southern Punjab region's backwardness may lead to creation of Daish. The sense of deprivation and economic disparity can be a factor behind the flourishing of the militant group in South Punjab¹⁶. The Southern Punjab region is the poorest region of Pakistan's richest and most populous province of Punjab. The underdevelopment and radicalization are closely related to each other. Due to the backwardness and poor condition of the people in South Punjab, the militant organization easily succeeded to create their militant wings and Madrassah of the South Punjab are playing a major role for extremism. The Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency's report has highlighted the poor condition and backwardness of the South Punjab region. The report shows that incidence of poverty in South Punjab is significantly higher than the rest of the Punjab Province. The statistics show 43.11 % population of the South Punjab is spending their lives below the

⁵<http://icasualties.org>

⁶ Thomas H. Johnson and M. Chris Mason, "No Sign until the Burst of Fire: Understanding the Pakistan-Afghanistan Frontier", *International Security*, Vol. 32, No.4, 2008, p.71.

⁷ Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) Punjab police list of wanted terrorists in suicide attacks 201-17.

⁸ *Ibid*,

⁹ *Ibid*,

¹⁰ *Ibid*,

¹¹ *Ibid*,

¹² *Ibid*,

¹³ *Ibid*,

¹⁴ Imran Gabool, "Meet the 110 most wanted terrorist Punjab", *Dawn*, Lahore, March12, 2015.

¹⁵ Zeshan Haider, "Militant groups in Pakistan's Punjab Province", *Reuters News Agency*, October 15, 2009

¹⁶ Javedur Rehman, "South Punjab backwardness may lead to ISIS (Daish) emergence", *The Nation*, Lahore, November2, 2014.

poverty line compared to 27.69 % for the entire Punjab¹⁷. The Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat which had worked with the old name of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Harkatul Jihad Islami Farooqi Group, Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), , Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Tehreek Taliban Pakistan Qari Obaid Group, Harkatul Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Tayyabe (LeT), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), Al Qaeda (AQ), Punjabi Group and Jamaat-UI-Furqan have not only increased their influences in South Punjab but also setup their strong network and continuously were changing the writ of the government.

The Washington, D.C. based center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) of United States of America had conducted research on South Punjab and has highlighted that there has a growing concern that militant organization such as Jamat-ul-Daawa (JuD), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and Jaish-e-Muhammad might have a strong presence in parts of Southern Punjab or large following of sympathizers among the people. A dominant impression is that there is a close connection between growing militancy and extremism all over the country and a growing number of religious seminaries in South Punjab¹⁸. Sometimes the activists from militant groups such as Jamat-ul-Daawa (JuD) are able to participate in the process of political representation at lower level however, these groups usually exercise their influences as outside pressure group. These usually support or facilitate individual political leaders rather than political parties. That helps them preserve their identity without clear/extended political liabilities. Such an arrangement also suits mainstream political parties who can, at times take advantage of short-term political support without becoming associated with militant. A similar relationship has existed between these organizations and some public functionaries who have cooperated with each other to maintain stability in the area of governance. In this way, militant organizations have influenced political or sub national governance system without becoming a clear part of them¹⁹. Nadeem Shah says that it was found that nine extremists held PhD Degrees, 108 had Postgraduate and 121 had Master Degree, and they included 286 Graduates and 416 had passes intermediate and 1180 matric, and only 36 extremists were illiterate²⁰. The radicalism has not been only religious basis; there are various kinds of extremism worldwide. The Ku Klux Klan was an extremist organization which worked on racial basis. This organization has entertained chauvinistic views of various kinds like white supremacy. This organization believed in white nationalism, and ant-immigration in the US. This organization did believe on religion and there was no role of religion in its activities. On the other hand, the Nazis during the Hitler's regime had used religion and Jewish were killed.

Recently, the white supremacy organization in Europe is not a religious based group, it is secular²¹. The radicalization and militancy are being expressed in the religious terms in Muslim majority countries especially in Pakistan. The Muslim activists put blames to the West that they have occupied Muslim states at different regions of the World. The West has controlled the resources of the Muslim countries. They have shaken the unity of the Muslim countries and are imposing poverty on them. They put an example in favour of their arguments that Jews had been settled by the West in Palestine and the financial and military support had been given to Jews/ Zionist regime by the West and U.S.. By the active help of United State of America, United Kingdom and European Union, Israel had continued to kill the Palestinian population. The Madaris students in Pakistan argue that the Christian West has levied wars on the Muslim countries out of religious considerations. The militant and religious organizations are continuously taking great advantage of bad governance in South Punjab region. Those militant organizations are projecting themselves as a better substitute to political parties. Moulana Masood Azhar, the head of The Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Tayyabe (LeT) subsidiary Falah-e-Insaniyat representatives keep on exhorting the state of poor governance in their speeches and sermons. They are exploiting the lack of medical facilities, jobs, social justice, adverse law and order conditions of Pakistan, and lack of resources to alleviate the suffering of common person²².

¹⁷ Muhammad Feyyaz, "Demand for Saraiki Province", *The Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) Report*, March, 2011.

¹⁸ SR Mehboob, "Governance and militancy in Pakistan's South Punjab Region", The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a think tank based in Washington, D.C, December, 2011.

¹⁹ SR Mehboob, "Governance and militancy in Pakistan's South Punjab Region", The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) is a think tank based in Washington, D.C, December, 2011

²⁰ Nadeem Shah, *Saraiki Region: Roots of Radicalization*, Lahore: Takleeqat Publisher, 2020, p.8

²¹ Prof. Aziz-ud-Rehman, "Roots of Extremism in Pakistan", Nadeem Shah, *Saraiki Region: Roots of Radicalization*, Lahore: Takleeqat Publisher, 2020, p.10

²² Nadeem Shah, *Saraiki Region: Roots of Radicalization*, Lahore: Takleeqat Publisher, 2020, p.50

Here we are examining radicalization in fourteen district of South Punjab regions:

MULTAN:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists tell that Multan is stronghold of three key militant organizations and groups. The active terrorist organizations which are operating in Multan are Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). The organizations had deep penetration and sleeper cells of banned militant group in the past²³.

KHANEWAL:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorists which are active operating their operations in Khanewal. The profiles of wanted terrorists reveal that the Al Qaeda (AQ) Farooq Punjabi Group, Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), , Jamatul Furqan and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) Qari Obais Group have sleeper cells and deep influence in the Khanewal district particularly in Tehsil Kabirwala²⁴. The Deobandi sect has an old Madrassah in Kabirwala from where the main leaders of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) have got religious education.

VEHARI:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organizations and also names of terrorists which are active participated into terrorist actives and are operating into terrorist attacks . The profiles of wanted terrorists show that District Vehari has also room for extremism and militancy. Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) have been vigorously working in Vehari district.²⁵

LODHRAN:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists have highlighted that key terrorist groups, such as Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), Harkatul Jihad Islami Amjad Farooqi group. Those terrorist organizations have penetration in the district of Lodhran, and remained involved in the recruitment of militant in past²⁶. Those terrorists groups have been operating and involved terrorist activities and attacks in Lodhran.

BAHAWALPUR:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists say that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), Harkatul Jihad Islami Amjad Farooqi group and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM) have a strong presence in Bahawalpur district. The Madrassah and Head Quarter of the head of The Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), Moulana Masood Azhar are situated in the District of Bahawalpur. Moulana Masood Azhar also belongs to Bahawalpur City²⁷.

BAHAWALNAGAR:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists have highlighted that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) has strong roots in this district²⁸.

RAHIM YAR KHAN:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists examine that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) and the Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) have very strong roots in Rahim Yar Khan District²⁹.

DERA GHAZI KHAN:

²³ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police profiles of wanted terrorists 2016-17.

²⁴ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police profiles of wanted terrorists 2016-17.

²⁵ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police profiles of wanted terrorists 2016-17.

²⁶ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police profiles of wanted terrorists 2016-17.

²⁷ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17.

²⁸ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni and shia activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

²⁹ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police profiles of wanted terrorists 2016-17.

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists say that only Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamaat-ul-Furqan Groups have a presence this district³⁰.

MUZAFFARGARH:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists say that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) have penetrated in the district³¹.

RAJANPUR:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists says that only Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Jamaat-ul-Furqan Groups have roots in Rajanpur. The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police reports examines that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) only has a strong presence in the district³².

LAYYAH:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists says that Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan³³ (TTP) and Jamaat-ul-Furqan Groups have very deep penetration in the district bordering South Waziristan³⁴.

JHANG:

District Jhang is birth place of The Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP), and Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) was established in Jhang when the Shia sect has established her political party Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Jafaria.

BHAKKAR:

“The Countering Terrorism Department of the Punjab Police” has prepared the list of terrorist’s organization and also names of terrorist. The profiles of wanted terrorists says that Lashar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan (SMP) have penetrated in the district³⁵.

MIANWALI:

Only Jamaat UIfurqan Tariq Karvan Group has a presence in the district³⁶.

Conclusion:

The lack of rule-of-law, poor governance, political and economic instability and unemployment allow terrorist organizations to use influence for disproportioning their size and social roots. The core goal of the National Action Plan (NAP) is the counterterrorism and it is planned to end discrepancies between “Good” Jihadists that are operating in India and Afghanistan, and “Bad” Jihadists, who make their targets to the security forces and other Pakistanis but the National

Action Plan (NAP) was not implemented to the true spirit of its goals, particularly reform and regulation of the madrasa sector. The state machinery is not ready to clamp down on it in religious madrassahs and mosques. The proper strategies and actions were not planned and launched to counter hate speech and stop distribution of hate literature that increased the potential for radicalization in South Punjab. The sustainable measures and steps should be taken by the government in South Punjab to stop the wave of Islamist militancy and extremism. The Provincial and Federal Governments should carry out the law against all Islamist Jihadist organizations, without exception to counter jihadist violence and terrorist attacks, within and beyond Pakistan’s borders that have links with regional and international terrorist groups and have an interminable source of recruits from large madrassahs and mosque networks in South Punjab.

Though Jihadist Groups are actively involved into terrorist attacks but still harbor a fringe minority in South Punjab where the huge mainstream is a more tolerant and liberal. Regardless of the presence of Islamist Jihadist Groups, the huge majority of people in Southern Punjab abide by more modest syncretic forms of Islam: Sufism, and Barelvism.

³⁰Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

³¹ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni and shia activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

³² Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of wanted terrorists in suicide attacks 2016-17

³³Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of wanted terrorists in suicide attacks 2016-17

³⁴ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

³⁵ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni and shia activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

³⁶ Counter Terrorism Department of Punjab Police list of Sunni activists involve in religious terrorism 2016-17

Recommendations

- 1-The climate of impunity i.e. Radicalization, militancy and sectarianism in Southern Punjab region can be ended if the Federal and Punjab Governments should change their selective counter-terrorism approaches and actions with a strategy that eliminates all Islamic Jihadist organizations that use violence against Pakistanis or from Pakistani territory to others countries.
- 2-The banned terrorist organizations should be investigated and monitored under the Anti-Terrorism Act or UN Security Council Resolution 1267 and all Madrassahs, Mosques and Charities that have alleged links to the band terrorist groups should be blacklist.
- 3- The Federal and Provincial Governments should take measures and steps to stop the circulation of hate literature and administer laws against hate speech in madrasahs, mosques and other forums.
- 4- Those NGOs and Civil Society organizations that are working for harmony and tolerance in South Punjab should be facilitated and protected.
- 5- The political, social and economic alienation in Southern Punjab should be redressed that play the major role to recruitment opportunities for jihadist groups.
- 6- The Madrassahs Reforms should be implemented and the Public Educational Institutions be expanded by removing intolerant religious discourse and distorted narratives glorifying jihadist violence from the classrooms.